

7 Ways of Resistance for Lent
Week Three: Redemption
John 4:5-42

I saw him when I went to draw water that day. He looked exhausted, worn out, leaning against the stone reservoir of Jacob's well. I bit my bottom lip, unsure of what to do. He wasn't just a man, he was Jew, and I a Samaritan woman. Women weren't supposed to speak to men in public who weren't our husbands or fathers or sons. And Jews didn't speak to Samaritans. We were despised and rejected, though we all had the same ancestors, the same origins of our peoples and faith. But we had kept our own temple here up north; and when the others went into exile, we assimilated. We survived, here, while they survived in exile and returned to rebuild.

Plus, I didn't speak to strangers. The people in town had enough bad things to say about me. I could only hope he didn't plan to stay in town, because surely he would know about my reputation then.

Then he turned, and he said, "Give me something to drink." He said it in a way that was more of a request than a command, but a request I should not refused.

But I did. "How is it that you, a Jew, are a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

What is he talking about? *He* would have drawn water for *me*? And how is water living or dead? "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Jacob, our ancestor, gave us this well—are you greater than he?"

He looked me in the eye. "Everyone who drinks of this well will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water I give them will never be thirsty. The water I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to internal life."

I dropped my bucket on the ground. "Sir, give me this water." I imagined being able to drink every day, and not having to climb this hill and haul water over and over again. I imagined being able to rest, to have a break from having to come out in public.

But then he said it. "Go, call your husband, and come back."

I lowered my gaze to the ground, trembling. "I have no husband."

"You are right in saying you have no husband, because you have had five husbands, and the one you are living with now is not your husband. You are telling the truth."

He knew all along. And he didn't use it against me. He didn't threaten me, ridicule me, or taunt me. Instead, he stated it as a fact instead of a judgment.

"I can see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped here, but you say we must all worship in Jerusalem." Any of the wandering prophets I had ever heard speak all told us we were wrong, in how we worshipped God, in the way we practiced our religion.

“The time is coming, woman, when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but true worshippers will soon worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is spirit.”

I looked back up at him. Still no judgment in his voice, no condemnation, not for me being a woman, a Samaritan, or a divorcee living with another. Instead, he seemed to be offering an invitation instead of condemnation: an invitation to a new way.

“I know the Messiah is coming,” I replied, “And that he will show us the way.”

“I am He.”

I almost fell to my knees, but I caught sight of twelve men, who were gasping in astonishment. But instead of hanging around to hear what they had to see, I turned and went down the mountain. I left my bucket behind because I did not care anymore about everyday life. I did not care anymore about working to be in a place where people ridiculed me and made all sorts of accusations.

Instead, I wanted to tell everyone about this person, who knew everything about me. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done? Could he be the Messiah?” I shouted down the streets. I told the story in the inns. I proclaimed it to all. And the people no longer avoided me. They wanted to know about this man. I think they wanted to know at first to see if he could really predict the future.

But for me, it was that he knew me, he welcomed me, and he accepted me, without judgment. All he wanted from me was to taste the living water, to have real, abundant life—not the life that others condemned me to, but the life of God found in the Spirit.

Redemption for many is about being forgiven from sin, to have one’s sin wiped away and no longer held against them. But redemption for me was about seeing me, knowing me, without judgment or condemnation, the way God sees all of us. Redemption for me was the freedom from oppression, the freedom from feeling trapped. Redemption for me was knowing that God was offering me the free gift of grace, through hospitality and welcome.

Worship Ideas for Redemption

Table décor: flowers in vases, trays of crackers and cheese and other foods served at an open house. A “Welcome to God’s Home” sign on the table, a welcome mat in front. A hat or coat rack with hats and coats hung up. A gift basket. Other symbols of kindness, welcome, and hospitality.

Mission Ideas for Redemption

- Host a “Get To Know Your Neighbors” event at your church and invite Muslim neighbors to speak.
- Contact a local mosque and arrange a time to visit.
- Visit an immigrant congregation, or invite an immigrant pastor to preach or lead a Bible study.
- Make “Welcome bags” for neighbors who live on the streets with toiletries, snacks, socks, and other items.

Liturgy

Call to Worship

God made the earth for us, to live in and enjoy;

God welcomes you into this beautiful home and asks that you help care for it.

God made us a people, a community of faith;

God welcomes you into the beloved community and says “You Belong.”

God made you a child in the Divine Image,

God welcomes you as a full participant in the kin-dom of God.

God has made you, with all your gifts and beauty,

Come, join in the work, share in your gifts,

and know that you are welcome and beloved by God and by us.

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess that we have not cared for the world You created to be our home. We confess we have not seen one another as kindred, siblings made in Your image, but instead have created theologies and designations bent on keeping people in by fear and keeping others out by prejudice. We have misheard Your wonderful welcome and instead have judged and condemned others. Forgive us for this grave wrong. Help us to right it. Help us to fling open the doors and raise the banners of love and peace, and welcome all into Your sanctuary, for You have welcomed us into Your home, here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Christ has issued the welcome again: that indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Christ. The welcome mat is out, the doors are open, the light is beckoning you to enter, and to invite others. Come, experience God's extravagant welcome and hospitality through Christ's redeeming love. Amen.

Prayer

Faithful Redeemer, through the story of our ancestor Ruth You extended to us a radical welcome, an embrace of all people, when we recognize the needs and cares of others as our own. When we declare, "Your people will be our people, your God, my God," we declare that we see all of Your children as included and welcomed and loved. As Ruth experienced that welcome into the beloved community by Naomi and by Boaz, may we be the redeeming-kin for all by including all people from around the world, all cultures and backgrounds, as Your children, made in the image of Your love, for Christ, You are our redeemer-kin, the One of the Living God who came so we may know God's love fully and that death does not have the final word. May we embrace eternal life and love with You and all Your children. Amen.